TROPICAL TOWN AND OTHER POEMS

BY
SALOMÓN
DE LA SELVA

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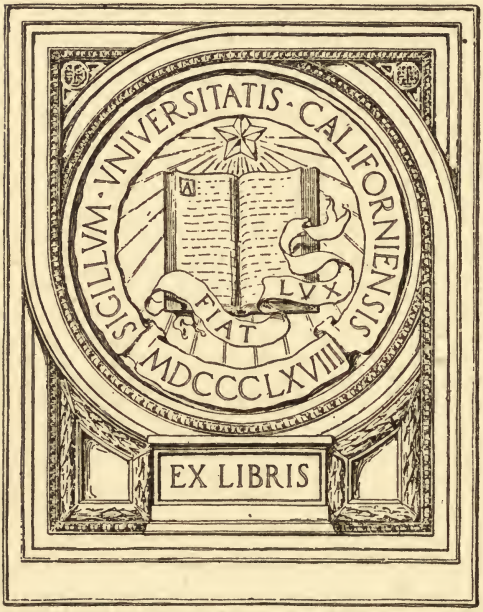

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BY

SALOMÓN DE LA SELVA

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English Alumnus

A
MI MADRE

PORQUE POSEE LA VIRTUD
DE FECUNDIDAD Y DE RESIGNACIÓN
QUE ES LA DE MI PATRIA

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MY NICARAGUA

TROPICAL TOWN

Blue, pink and yellow houses, and, afar,
The cemetery, where the green trees are.

Sometimes you see a hungry dog pass by,
And there are always buzzards in the sky.
Sometimes you hear the big cathedral bell,
A blindman rings it; and sometimes you hear
A rumbling ox-cart that brings wood to sell.
Else nothing ever breaks the ancient spell
That holds the town asleep, save, once a year,
The Easter festival. . . .

I come from there,
And when I tire of hoping, and despair
Is heavy over me, my thoughts go far,
Beyond that length of lazy street, to where
The lonely green trees and the white graves are.

For Miss Eugenia L. V. Geisenheimer.

TROPICAL HOUSE

When the Winter comes, I will take you to
Nicaragua,—
You will love it there!
You will love my home, my house in Nicaragua,
So large and queenly looking, with a haughty air
That seems to tell the mountains, the mountains
of Nicaragua,
—"You may roar and you may tremble, for all
I care!"

It is shadowy and cool;
Has a garden in the middle where fruit-trees
grow,
And poppies, like a little army, row on row,
And jasmine bushes that will make you think of
snow,
They are so white and light, so perfect and so
frail,
And when the wind is blowing they fly and flutter
so!

The bath is in the garden, like a sort of pool,
With walls of honey-suckle and orchids all
around.
The humming-bird is always making a sleepy
sound.
In the night there's the Aztec nightingale.

But when the moon is up, in Nicaragua,
The moon of Nicaragua and the million stars,
It's the human heart that sings, and the heart of
Nicaragua,
To the pleading, plaintive music of guitars.

For Señorita María Teresa Moreno.

TROPICAL PARK

The park in León is but a garden
Where grass and roses grow together;
It has no ordinance, and no warden,
Except the weather.

The paths are made of sand so fine
That they are always smooth and neat;
Sunlight and moonlight make them shine,
And so one's feet

Seem ever to tread on magic ground
That glistens and whispers curiously,
For sand, when you tread it, has the sound
Of the sea.

Sometimes the band, of a warm night,
Makes music in the little park,
And lovers seek, beyond the bright
Foot-paths, the dark.

You can almost tell what they do and say
From the soft gossip of the sand,—
What warm lips whisper, how glances play,
And hand seeks hand.

TROPICAL MORNING

In the mornings,—ah, the tropical mornings
When the bells were all so dizzily calling one to prayer!—
All my thought was to watch, from a nook in my window,
Indian girls from the river with flowers in their hair.

One bore
Fresh eggs in wicker boxes,
For the grocery store;
Others, baskets of fruit; and some
The skins of mountain cats and foxes
Caught in traps at home.

I would say,
God bless the womb that bore
The likes of you!
And another day,
Angels could not be more
Lovely than you!
Or, wild with youth and heathen-gay,
Faithful men adore
Virgins less beautiful than you!

They would reply,
Leave my mother alone!
And, with a mocking eye,

You are no saint of stone!
Or, sour and dry,
Blasphemer against Heavèn,
In Hell you will atone!

They all passed so stately by, they all walked so
gracefully,
Balancing their bodies on lithe, unstable hips,
Surely, a music moved them that swelled in their
bosoms
And was pizzicati at their finger tips!

But it was never the music of cathedral bells,
Though there were tapers burning there,
And smoke that rose in fragrant clouds,
And a wonderful wistfulness of prayer.

GUITAR SONG WITH VARIATIONS

Beneath the stars, beneath the moon,
Over the sands, beside the sea,
One time, in Nicaragua,
I was a poet.

I and my guitar were always
  Talking to each other,
Like lover and belovèd,
  Like child and mother.

Intimate things of wonder
  That did not matter much
Except that she trembled so
  At my touch.

Like waves that come and go,
  Like winds that kiss and fly,
With a fleeting, pleading something
  That seems to smile, that seems to sigh.

Who ever caught the moonlight
  With mortal fingers, or laid hands
Upon the wind the while it swept
  Over the sands?

My song was made of moonlight,—
  You cannot catch it, though you try!
My song had the wings of the wind upon it,
  And it shall pass you by.

Beneath the stars, beneath the moon,
Over the sands, beside the sea,
One time, in Nicaragua,
I was a poet.

Youth is a song, and love a song,
  Beside wide waters ringing
When God makes music high in heavèn
  And all the stars are singing.

God and the stars are always
  Whispering to each other,
Like lover and belovèd,
  Like child and mother.

Youth matters little, love matters little,
  So quick to vanish away!
Only they know God is so near
  They never have the need to pray.

Like waves that come and go,
  Like wings that beat and fly,
With a fleeting, pleading something
  That seems to smile, that seems to sigh.

Who ever caught love's tresses
  With mortal fingers, or laid hands
On youth's sweet body while it dreamed
  On shifting sands?

My song was all a song of youth,—
  You cannot catch it, though you try!
My song had the wings of love upon it,
  And it shall pass you by.

Beneath the stars, beneath the moon,
Over the sands, beside the sea,
One time, in Nicaragua,
I was a poet.

Life is a music, and death a music,
  A waking song and a lullaby,
Measure on measure weaving, unfolding,
  Forever vanishing in the sky.

Life and death are always
  Answering each other,
Like lover and belovèd,
  Like child and mother.

Intimate things of wonder
  That would not matter much
Except that they tremble so
  At each other's touch.

Like waves that come and go,
  Like birds that mate and fly,
With a fleeting, pleading something
  That seems to smile, that seems to sigh.

Who ever caught life's breathing
With mortal fingers, or laid hands
On death's cool shoulders casting shadows
On the sands?

My song was a splendid song of living,—
You cannot catch it, though you try!
My song had the wings of death upon it,
And it shall pass you by.

Beneath the stars, beneath the moon,
Over the sands, beside the sea,
One time, in Nicaragua,
I was a poet.

For Miss Florence Shepard Rogers.

TROPICAL DANCE

(Central American Folk-song)

—How were you born, Pelota?
  —I was born nude, Pelota.
—Not so the corn, Pelota!
  —The corn is not lewd, Pelota,
    Not lewd as I, my God!

—Where do you run, Pelota?
  —Far to the South, Pelota.
—Not so the sun, Pelota!
  —There is a mouth, Pelota,
    No sun knows but I, my God!

THE MIDGET MAIDEN

(Spanish Folk-song)

Girls of seventeen
  Little babies bear,
I am almost twenty,
  For this I despair.

Oh, I am so little,
  They say, *She's so young!*
I can't bear it, mother,
  So I sing this song:

My breasts are ripe
  And I am of age,
God grant me for lover
  The king's little page.

THE GIRL THAT WAS WISE

(Central American Folk-song)

What would you do if I were poor,
Tell me, what would you do?
I'd keep a tiny grocery store
Where all the folk would buy
Because my balance weights were true,
My sugar-measure high.

But that would take a lot of money,
And what if we had none?
In all the woods I'd gather honey
And sell it in the town
With little twigs of cinnamon
So sweet and thick and brown!

Then come, and I will marry you
For money none have I.
I merely said what I would do,
But I don't think I'll try,
I do not think I'll try.

TROPICAL RAIN

THE rain, in Nicaragua, it is a witch they say;
She puts the world into her bag and blows the skies away;
And so, in every home, the little children gather,
Run up like little animals and kneel beside the mother,
So frightened by the thunder that they can hardly pray.

Sweet Jesu, you that stilled the storm in Galilee,
Pity the homeless now, and the travellers by sea;
Pity the little birds that have no nest, that are forlorn;
Pity the butterfly; pity the honey-bee;
Pity the roses that are so helpless, and the unsheltered corn,
And pity me. . . .

Then, when the rain is over and the children's prayer is said,
Oh joy of swaying palm trees with the rainbows overhead,
And the streets swollen like rivers, and the wet earth's smell,
And all the ants with sudden wings filling the heart with wonder,
And, afar, the tempest vanishing with a stifled thunder
In a glare of lurid radiance from the gaping mouth of Hell!

THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF LEÓN

(Burned by American Filibusters 1860)

Shattered walls
The rain has eaten,
The earthquakes shaken,
The swift storms beaten,—

No one owns them,
No one would care
To mend them and roof them
And live there.

They say that house
Was burned down
By the Yankee filibusters
When they sacked the town:

Sons of the Devil
Who drank to the Devil
All one night, and burned the house
After the revel.

People passing by it
In the night, have seen
Phantom lights moving there
Ghostly green.

Faithful wives,
Going to prayer
In the early morning,
Have seen shadows there.

And la Juanita,
  Whom the Devil took
For his bride one night
  And then forsook—

Where else was her body,
  Her bruised body, found,
But in that bit of Devil's church,
  Lying on the ground?

Shattered walls
  The rain has eaten,
The earthquakes shaken,
  The swift storms beaten,—

No one owns them,
  No one would care
To mend them and roof them
  And live there.—

I will marry a Yankee girl
  And we will dare!

For Mrs. John Lewis Childs.

A SONG FOR WALL STREET

In Nicaragua, my Nicaragua,
What can you buy for a penny there?—
A basketful of apricots,
A water jug of earthenware,
A rosary of coral beads
And a priest's prayer.

And for two pennies? For two new pennies?—
The strangest music ever heard
All from the brittle little throat
Of a clay bird,
And, for good measure, we will give you
A patriot's word.

And for a nickel? A bright white nickel?—
It's lots of land a man can buy,
A golden mine that's long and deep,
A forest growing high,
And a little house with a red roof
And a river passing by.

But for your dollar, your dirty dollar,
Your greenish leprosy,
It's only hatred you shall get
From all my folks and me;
So keep your dollar where it belongs
And let us be!

TROPICAL AFTERNOON

I USED to watch the women going down
With earthen jugs where water never fails,
Summing the daily gossip of the town
And making new remembrance of old tales.
So suns might set and mornings rise, and flowers
Blossom and fall: these never gave them care;
To them the ceaseless toiling of the hours
Was but a pretty thing to make them fair.

The winds are just that way, that talk so free;
The pleasant rivers, running, are that way,
And all the leaves and roots of a young tree
That feed on wind, suck the wet earth, and know
Such familiarity with every day
They care not how the wind and waters go.

TROPICAL LIFE

THERE'S a grave where my father lies,
But I mind me rather of a place
Was as familiar to his eyes
As his father's face.

The street that's bounded by ancient houses
Runs to the park, and there the sun
Is like a golden flock that browses
Until day is done.

The light is heavy, and moves so slow,
And sometimes huddles in a heap
And seems to lift large heads and go
To thoughtful sleep.

I wonder if ever he saw the light
This way. He must have thought strange things
(And never told them, that I might),
So fast there clings

To my remembrance of his ways
A memory of herds of sun
Pasturing quietly through his days
Until life was done.

ALL SOULS' DAY

THE day my people hold
Dedicate to the dead,
There are no flowers red or gold
In any flower bed,

Or cypress tree but shows
Torn branches to the sun,—
But the white graves are green and rose
And happy every one.

Along the long straight street
The living measure slow,
On half-reluctant, conscious feet,
The way that all must go.

The year is at November,
The wind's a weary call;
They wonder why they should remember
This sorry festival;

They wonder why they dressed
To shine under the sun,
The flowers they cut were at their best
And happy every one. . . .

Thank God the blindman rings
His beautiful sad bell!
For there's a voice in it that sings
What I could never tell.

For Mr. William Dean Howells.

TROPICAL CHILDHOOD

Toys I had, soldiers of lead and a sword of tin
And kites and tops; but I broke the silly sword
And melt the soldiers, and fast as a top may spin
And high as a kite may fly, I sent a word
Whirling and soaring: asking. I was so thin
And restless; scarcely spoke and hardly heard
What people gossiped, too busy with the din
Of that one answer that daily was deferred.

And so I grew, and one day saw the tears
That made my mother's cheek salty to kiss,
And looked behind me at the vanishing years,
And looked before me at the approaching tide,
And knew myself a turmoil of mysteries
And life a whirlwind rushing at my side.

BIRDS OF CLAY

Birds of clay I whistled through,
Have you flown away?
I remember the smell of you,
Birds of clay!

Old it was, so old, so old,—
Dust of centuries of dead!
All my childhood I was told
You would fly, and are you fled?

When I am dead I want to lie
Where in the centuries to be
Children shall utter song and cry
Through the wingèd dust of me.

BODY AND SOUL

I

This cobweb of long streets is called León.
The spider Time began and left it there
To dangle in the still, tropical air
Moved in no wind but by the breathing sun.
The coloured roofs are sorry captured wings,
The churches are brown beetle carcasses;
And nothing quickens, all is loneliness,
Save when, importunate, an old bell rings.

Beside León, Subtiava sprawls. It has
No other colours but the green of trees,
The gray of huts, the zinc of dusty grass.
The Spanish city and the Indian lie,
Unmindful of the tread of centuries,
Unchangeable beneath the changeless sky.

II

Lust and despair, hunger and grief, here tread
On padded feet, afraid Life may arise;
Youth's passion is at best a sick surmise,
Youth's dreams are children sickly born, or dead.
Disease makes visitings familiarly:
The rich have prayers said, the priestless poor
Drink bitter roots. And Death is but a boor
That will not let this doing-nothing be.

God is somewhere, perhaps. And Satan too.
There is a Heaven, yes. There is a Hell.—
Facility of faith where skies are blue
And the volcanoes groan like souls in pain!
But the glad will to live! Alas, it fell,
A stricken tree, under the blight of Spain.

III

This is the body, this the soul of you,
Ah, Nicaragua, mother dolorous!
Nor is it lack of love to see you thus,—
Were I less sorrowful, my song less true,
I would belie the blood runs in my veins.
My love is savage: I will strip you bare,
And wound you with the sight of your despair,
And whip you with the leash of your own pains.

But when the dawn is red after this night,
When I have beaten you to gestate wrath,
You shall behold your self and test your might,
And through this sad and barren laziness
Shall stretch my passion, your triumphal path,
And you shall weep to know my tenderness.

For Dr. Manuel Maldonado

MY NICARAGUA

You take the street that runs by the cathedral
And go some fourteen blocks and up a hill
And past the three-arch bridge until you come
To Guadalupe. There the houses are
No stately Spanish palaces, flat and lazy,
As in the center of the town you see,
Heavy with some three centuries upon them,
Accustomed to the sunlight and the earthquakes,
Half bored, you fancy, by these ways of nature;
But little things, ugly almost, and frail,
With low red roofs and flimsy rough cut doors,
A trifle better than an Indian hut;
Not picturesque, just dreary commonplace,
As commonplace and dreary as the flats
Here in your cities where your poor folks live;
And yet they seem so glad the sun is shining,
So glad a little wind begins to blow,
Too humbly, purely glad to say it,—
And all the while afraid of the volcanoes,
Holding their breath lest these should wake and crush them.

Look through the doors ajar and see the walls
With holy pictures, saints and angels there,—
Like little windows opening to Heaven,—
Sold to my people, reverenced by them.
And see the children, playing, wrangling, dreaming,
Oh, much the way that children are elsewhere.

And see the faithful wives, sweeping or mending,
Setting their tables, doing the thousand things
Hardly worth noticing that women do
About their houses, meaning life to them.
And if you listen, you may hear them sing:
Not anywhere are better songs than theirs!
That rise and melt away like incense smoke,
And can, if pressed too hard against the heart,
Drip heavy drops that are all women's tears.

But if you hire a guide, no guide will ever
Think of directing you to see this mere
Unhonoured dailiness of people's lives
That is the soil the roots of beauty know.
The old cathedral that the Spaniards built,
With hand-carved altars for two thousand saints;
The ruined fortress where they say that Nelson
Lost his left eye when he was but a pirate—
Oh, broken piles of masonry outworn,
The shreds and trash of things that were of price,
Cocoons forgotten whence the butterflies
Of love of country and of love of God
Rose, and were lost among the fields afar!

The *dear* hotels with palm trees in the garden
And a self-playing piano drumming rags,
Where you drink lemonade and rack your brains
Thinking: What in the devil's name is Tropics?—
The shops of German, English and French owners;

The parlours of the ruling class adorned
With much the same bad taste as in New York,—
That never was my country! But the rows
Of earthen little houses where men dwell,
And women, all too busy living life
To think of faking it, that is my country,
My Nicaragua, mother of great poets!

And when you see that, what? That in despite
Newspapered revolutions and so forth,
The different climate and the different
Traditions and grandfathers of the race,
My people and your people are the same:
Folks with their worries and their hopes about
them,
Toiling for bread, and for a something more
That ever changes, that no one could name—
And this is worth the journey to find out.

THE DREAMER'S HEART KNOWS ITS OWN BITTERNESS

(A Pan-American Poem on the Entrance of the United States into the War)

From the South am I, from the tropic lands;
I was born where the sunlight is molten gold:
If you probe my heart, if you pierce my hands,
You will know the blood that is never cold.

Where the mountains raise large mouths of fire
That kiss the clouds perpetually,
It was there I learned of the heart's desire,
And the soul of the mountains is the soul of me.

To the North I came, with a dream, with a song,
With a noise like the music of the rain in the Spring,
For I held the Vision and it ruled my tongue,
And North and South would hear me sing.

To the South I said: "You are my Mother:
With your will you have shaped me, with your rich breasts fed;
Your daughters I call Sister, your sons, my Brother;
In my hour of need I will call on no other,—
You will close my eyes when I am dead."

To the North I said: "You are my Bride:
I have found you fair, you shall know me true;
We will rise together, side by side;
On a day, you shall cherish my love with pride,
For who praise my name shall honour you."

And again I spoke in my Mother's face:
"This is your daughter, this foreign land;
For my love of her I have dared disgrace:
I have shattered the walls of creed and race,
Love was so true that no walls could stand.

"For this land I have blushed when its choice
was shame;
For this land I have cheered with all my breath;
Sweet in my ears is its very name:
For its sake I would die the soldier's death.

"Not false to you, Mother; not false, my Mother!
It were not in my blood to be false to you!
You have I cherished above all other,
But I love this land, and my flags are two."

These words I spoke till to hear them there
Arose from the Past, blood-thirsty and shrill,
A savage cry, a savage prayer
To forget him not. But I sang on still
With the dreamer's passion, with the poet's will.

I knew the Past: what the years had done:
What the heedless North, what the headlong
South;
But the Past was night, and I was the sun
And the light of the morning was on my mouth.

For a pact I came, for a living scroll,
For a singing vow that the North should take,
For a pledge immortal as my soul
That not even the hatred of hell might break.

I would die in battle for the least of these lands;
Their sorrows are mine, I have cried for their
wrong;
I have given them ever the work of my hands,
But I shaped them the future in my gift of song.

Unbelief was against me, with sneer, with scold,
With impotent jeer and rancorous whine;
But mine was youth and belief was mine:
I was the blood that is never cold,
And my faith had the strength of a heady wine.

From the vineyard of flags I had plucked racemes
Of grapes that were stars and suns in the shields,
I had crushed these clusters and I knew the
dreams
That the wine of flags to the drinker yields:

On a day I saw, as I raised my eyes,
The Condor and Eagle in epic flight;
Their wings were black, and over the skies
They cast a sudden prefigured night.

The sky of peace they rent in two:
Taloned with hatred, clawed with threat,
They sprang at each other athwart the blue:
They had heard the Past's "Lest ye forget!"
But I flung my dreams and, as they flew,
My swift song caught them as in a net.

On a day the sea wind buffeted me
And the sea spray salted my hair and lips,
And I saw, as I turned to the angry sea,
That the waters were black with war-rigged ships.

Southward they bore, for the foe lay there.
I looked and I saw, from coast to coast,
That the South had leaped like a beast from its lair,
It had heard the Past's blood-thirsty prayer,
And twenty banners smote the air,
And the twenty peoples were as one host.

Never was craftier siren song
Than the song I sang till the waters lay
Untroubled blue as when the young
Feet of the stars first danced along
Its burnished floor in the world's third day.

But now a cry like a red flamingo
Has winged its way to the Judgment gates:
My Nicaragua and Santo Domingo
Shorn in their leanness by the "famous States"!

Harried and thieved in their want, in their hunger,
Their honour flaunted for a thing of laughter. . . .
—You have done this because you are the stronger,
Do you know what deeds may follow after?

In the night I have risen from sleep and rest
With the cry of the plundered lands in my ears,
Have you not enough in this land of the best
That you trespass beyond with unholy shears?

Will the birds be loosened that I caught in air?
Must the blue sea blacken with warlike ships?
O my Bride, O my Bride whom I found so fair,
Is my wooing naught, and must I despair
Who have come with this hope of song on my lips?—

Who have come to the North with a dream, with a song,
In the furrows of morning sowing the Spring?—
Is this vain, this Vision that has ruled my tongue?—
But yet once more must you hear me sing:

War at your gates is a beggar no longer,
You have crossed the sea with the terrible Stranger,
You have challenged the might of Belgium's wronger:
Dreadful you stand like the winged Avenger.

Will you let this thing be said of you,
That you stood for Right who were clothed with Wrong?
That to Latin America you proved untrue?
That you clamoured for justice with a guilty tongue?

Hear me, who cry for the sore oppressed:
Make right this grievance that I bear in me
Like a lance point driven into my breast!
So, blameless and righteous, your strength shall be
The power of God made manifest,
And I pledge the South shall never rest
Till your task is accomplished and the world is free.

IN NEW ENGLAND AND OTHER LYRICS

DELIVERANCE

WHAT am I doing, here, in New England?
All day long, till the end of the purple afternoon,
Watching to see, over the hills of New England,
The rising of the universal moon.

PORTRAIT

Like frozen water there I found him,
With thoughts that were like leafless trees around
him.

Like water frozen to its depth I saw him,
No summer ever was long enough to thaw him.

I tried to make him angry, only
He grew more cold and reticent and lonely.

I tried all ways I could to love him:
I crept up closer and I leaned above him.

I pierced his surface in good part
And made a plumb-line of my heart:

But he was frozen through and through,
How deep he was I never knew.

THE SECRET

THIS, in the lower Berkshires,
Was most like witchery,
At evening, in the Springtime,
The bark of a white birch tree
Turned flesh, for my sake only,
So soft to touch, so rose to see.

When the cool sun was setting
The sky spread out her hair
Over the pillowy mountains
Heaped for her comfort there,
And I saw, like bathing women,
White birches tossing in the air.

But the good folk grew sulky
Because I would not pay
A compliment to the Springtime
In that New England day;
And they murmured because I wanted
To pack my things and run away.

CONFIDENCES

I HAVE told you my secret,
And the white birch tree
Is wistful; the little valleys
Are dreaming of the sea.

The hills have gathered round me
To hear me tell
Of the deep volcanoes
Where the old gods dwell.

O little child New England,
And did you like to burn
Witches? And were you really
Ever so stern?

Dance, all you little children,
And I will play with you!
I am afraid of witches
Also; I burn them too. . . .

FINALLY

FINALLY, after months of being shy,
An Autumn and a Winter of looking at each other
With a suspecting eye,
It is good to know at last that I have found you,
New England, little mother!
Ah, good to put my arms around you,
To clasp you fast and hold you fast,
Suspicion done away, and shyness past,
Now, in the Springtime,—thank God, the Spring at last!

You are not feelingless, you are not cold:
There are your farmer women suddenly lose their mind,
Afraid of the long silences, afraid of growing old,
Eager for a larger living, eager to seek and find
What the new winds tell, what the old winds told,
How passionate, my God! how passionately blind.

You are not heartless, you are not unkind:
There was the sweet old couple that took care of me;
Their son, grown up and gone, they, left behind,
Loving all mothers' sons with unquestioning charity.

It was most of the nights they would sit up and wait
Till I was safe in bed and warm in bed;
And their call, in the chilly mornings, lest I be late;
And their coffee hot for me, and their raisin bread!
And never a penny asked for the kindness, never a penny paid,
And always the loving word, *God will be good to you!*—
With all my heart this in my soul I said:
It is now His goodness shows, and this was true.

I have travelled in many lands, I have lived in many places,
New England hearts are the kindest hearts I ever knew:
For courtesy the ways of them, for honesty their open faces:—
Poets who tell the truth of people are so few,
I will go through all the world again, New England, and sing your praises.

I will go to all the places where ever I have gone,
And last to Nicaragua, where I will tell my people:
"They haven't any cathedrals, their worshipping is done

In little bits of churches, painted white, with a pointed steeple,
But their God is the God of us, their Christ is Mary's son.

"They haven't the lakes we have, or the wild cow herds;
And it's very cold in Winter, and very hot in Summer;
And at talking they are sort of slow, being poor of words,
But there was never a New England door that turned away a roamer,
And in the Spring the little woods are thick with birds!

"Once, when my heart went out of me, a careless rover,
A white birch tree was growing on a New England hill
Turned flesh, for my sake only, and let me be her lover
Till I was sane and quiet again, having had my fill,
Hushed with the breathless wonder that my love could move her.

"It was a little, gray New England woman I told the story to;
She did not run with fear of hell to tell the parish priest—

The way our old Church-haunting women do—
But looked at me with eyes were tenderer than
moonlight in the mist,
And, *God will be good to you,* she said; *God will*
be good to you.
And it was then and there that He was good to
me, and this is true."

For Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Roberts, of Williamstown, Mass.

MEASURE

In a little pool
You could jump over,
I saw reflected
All of the sky.

I wondered: How
Should one rightly measure
This lovely water,—
By the earth that holds it?
By the heaven it holds?

You know how I measured it!

For Mrs. Daniel E. Wheeler

INMATE

The woman whose heart is scarcely stirred
Except to feel the evening air,
May be, perhaps, like a brown bird
For all her witchery of hair.

May be, perhaps, if she could tell,
A withered leaf in Autumn weather,
Or broken glass, or a dry well,
Or like a bright wing's cast off feather.

I say to myself, over and over,
The pity of things that play a while;
And was the wind her only lover,
That she can only look and smile?

I say to myself, No one shall know
The secret of the song she sings,
Except the loneliness of the snow,
And sea-weeds when the tide is low,
And the great anguish of passing wings.

SONG OF THE MAGDALEN

PETER holds the keys,
  And one is fire, and one is gold;
But I have far more than these:
  His heart I hold.

On the Cross He lies,
  Tortured limb on wooden limb,
But to me He turns His eyes
  And mine to Him.

CELLINI AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Salt cellar for the Rospigliosi: Here
The turtle is a symbol of all time
Except his own who wrought the symbol. Then
The dragon claws, the dragon wings and, more,
The rhythmic thrust of the lithe dragon body,
Sought to outdo, all in a sudden sunrise,
The perfect poise and tread of centuries
That thorough night had laboured on to morning;
And only pointed ways, arrived no where
And held an empty cup of goldenness
To the eternal questionings. The Sphinx
Twines calmly siren limbs—ever the call!
Hangs from her breast the pearl of all desire,
A conquered mist, attainable in form,
Inviolate forever in the dream
Heavèn itself hides from the dragon's seeing.

Knowing that symbols too have parentage—
A thread of being folding them forever
So that the perfect symbol sums all things,—
I know the Sphinx, the dragon and the shell
Are but the soaring issue born of Time
That, imperturbedly, fulfilled within
The measure of its roundness, neither seeks
Or ever finds.

Thus, from all restlessness
Of outward action, rest and peace are here
Told, in a gold salt cellar for a prince,
By one who in a whim grew generous
And summed his life and gave it all in symbols.

THREE SONGS MY LITTLE SISTER MADE

I. Make-Believe

Mariposa, mariposita,
la del ala azul,
vamos a volvernos locas
de tanta luz!

Butterfly, butterfly,
You whose wings are blue!
Let us riot in the sunlight
Mad with dew.

Butterfly, butterfly,
You whose wings are bright!
Let us riot in the darkness
Mad with light.

Go and say good-by
To the pretty rose,
Go and say good-by
And give her a kiss.

I will call the carpenter:
—"Carpenter, at once
Make a little coffin
Wide enough for three. . . ."

I will call the priest:
—"Father, say a mass
For the butterfly,
For the rose and me. . . ."

Mother, I am crazy!
Playing I was dead
With the butterfly
In the flower bed.

All the flowers laughed,
Excepting the rose,
All the flowers laughed,
But I was the rose!

II. Pennies

Los centavos son de los pobres,
de los ciegos y los tullidos,
de los que sufren grandes hambres
y van rezando en los caminos.

Pennies are for beggars
For the halt and blind,
For the hungry people
To pray for and find.

For myself I only
Want a bit of glass
Coloured with the colours
Of the days that pass.

For myself I only
Want a garden seat;
Pennies are for beggars
Begging in the street.

For myself I only
Want a butterfly,
If alive, to chase it,
And if dead, to cry.

For myself I only
Want perishing things;
Pennies are for beggars
And I come from kings.

This about my Mother
Is surpassing strange,
That she counts the pennies
From the baker's change.

III. Moonrise

Voy a hacer rey a mi novio
con una corona de oro.

I will make my lover King, I will give him a
golden crown;
I will send the heralds on horses to proclaim him
through the town;

I myself will come before him and before him
will kneel down
With, "My liege, I am thy servant, though I
gave thee the golden crown."

He will rise, and the folds of his mantle will show
how he is proud;
He will rise as when the silver moon rises over a
space of cloud;
He will see me, like a water, heaving before him,
crying aloud,
And perhaps I shall be Queen, or the moonlight
will be my shroud.

SONNET

Are you awake, Belovèd? Come and see
My special garden, set and sown apart
In the most secret corner of my heart.
Never the butterfly, never the bee
Has sucked a blossom there; no day too sunny
Has dried a leaf; no wind has swept and bent
A single careless branch: with fruit unspent
The trees are heavy, and the flowers with honey.

But I am hurt with this too rich excess:
Come thirsty, hot and swift! Come butterfly,
Come sun, come wind! and twist my trees awry,
Scatter my fruit, and of this perfectness
Leave only ruins where the Spring next year
May say, This place is mine, love triumphed here.

COURTSHIP

Am I too changeful, Death?
You are too changeful too;
Then leave me here to draw my breath
And come no more to woo.

We'd make too false a wife,
A husband too untrue:
Sometimes I am in love with Life
And Life is sometimes you.

THREE SONGS

I. Tryst

There were black roses there
  And a lake of snow,
And silver wings were in the air—
  That is all I know:
There were black roses there
  And a lake of snow.

Do you remember—no?—
  How it was tragic there?
Black roses all a-row
  Growing for your hair;
And the little lake of snow,
  How it was tragic there!

II. Worn Toy

As a child gives what it no more desires,
With a quick gesture and avertedly,
Grown weary of her heart, as a child tires
Of a worn toy, she gave her heart to me.

III. The Birch Tree

I loved a bit of New England once
  (God knows why!),
A white birch delicate against the snow
  Or the gray sky;

But it was the wind that wrung its branches,
That clasped and held and flung its branches,—
The wind, not I.

For Miss Gertrude Watson.

IN WAR TIME

A PRAYER FOR THE UNITED STATES *August,* 1917.

Apocalyptic blasts are ravaging over-sea.
With lure of flag and conquest the harlot War is wooing.
The horse John saw in Patmos its dread course is pursuing.—
I pray the Lord He shelter the stars that shelter me.

HATRED

When hunger crawls
Up to the heart, and draws
Its dragon form about it, and its claws
Make all the limbs to ache; when darkness falls
Upon the bloodshot eyes
While yet the imperturbèd skies
Are full of light;
When lips God made for laughter cry outright,
Whether it be the fault of man or fate,
The heart God made for loving learns to hate
And swells with hatred, hatred from the core.
All else is antique rhetoric and serves
For literature to cheat the hard-strung nerves
Of people weary with the weight of war.

DECEMBER, 1916

Early December this year of grace
(*This year of sorrow,* the world's heart saith),
Here, in New England, earth's wrinkled face
Is frozen stiff, as if some death
Painful and sudden had struck it so.
There are no signs as yet of snow
(*No signs of peace,* the world's heart saith).

I almost could think some battle here
Was fought, and mangled bodies lie,
Frozen and filthy, under the drear
Gaze of the sun, the moon, the sky,
Who still, for this, forbid the snow.

But God is punctual and snow will come
(*And peace will come,* the world's heart saith),
And earth will hide her troublesome
Face of despair, semblance of death.
But this frozen horror that we know
Shall be terrible still, under the snow
(*Peace shall be terrible,* the world's heart saith).

DRILL

WILLIAMS COLLEGE, *April*, 1917

One! two, three, four,
One! two, three, four,
One, two. . . .

It is hard to keep in time
Marching through
The rutted slime
With no drum to play for you.

One! two, three, four! . . .

And the shuffle of six hundred feet
Till the marching line is neat.

Then the wet New England valley
With the purple hills around
Takes us gently, musically,
With a kindly heart and willing,
Thrilling, filling with the sound
Of our drilling.

Battle fields are far away.
All the world about me seems
The fulfillment of my dreams.
God, how good it is to be
Young and glad to-day!

One! two, three, four,
One! two, three. . . .

Now, as never before,
From the vastness of the sky,
Falls on me the sense of war.
Now, as never before,
Comes the feeling that to die
Is no duty vain and sore.
Something calls and speaks to me,—
Cloud and hill and stream and tree;
Something calls and speaks to me
From the earth, familiarly.
I will rise and I will go
As the rivers flow to sea,
As the sap mounts up the tree
That the flowers may blow.—
God, my God,
All my soul is out of me!

God, my God,
Your world is much too beautiful! I feel
My senses melt and reel;
And my heart aches as if a sudden steel
Had pierced me through and through.
I cannot bear
This too vigorous sweetness in your air;
The sunlight smites me heavy blow on blow,
My soul is black and blue

And blind and dizzy. God, my mortal eyes
Cannot resist the onslaught of your skies!
I am no wind, I cannot rise and go
Tearing in madness to the woods and sea;
I am no tree,
I cannot push the earth and lift and grow;
I am no rock
To stand unmovable against this shock.
Behold me now, a too desirous thing,
Passionate lover of your ardent Spring,
Held in her arms too fast, too fiercely pressed
Against her thundering breast
That leaps and crushes me!

One! two, three, four,
One! two, three, four,
One, two, three. . . .

So it shall be
In Flanders or in France. After a long
Winter of heavy burthens and loud war
I will forget, as I do now, all things
Except the perfect beauty of the earth.
Strangely familiar, I will hear a song,
As I do now, above the battle roar,
That will set free my pent imaginings
And quiet all surprise;
My body will seem lighter than the air,
Easier to sway than a green stalk of corn;
Heavèn shall bend above me in its mirth

With flutter of blue wings;
And singing, singing, as to-day it sings,
The earth will call to me, will call and rise
And take me in its bosom there to bear
My mortal-feeble being to new birth
Upon a world, this world, as I reborn,
Where I shall be
Alive again and young again and glad and free.

One! two! three! four!
One! two! three! four!
One! two! three! . . .

All the world about me seems
The fulfillment of my dreams.

ODE TO THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING

O LYRIC-ARDENT, lily-white, arrayed
Like some knight-worshipped mediæval maid

The evening of her nuptials, in a gown
Whose long chaste folds fall rigorously down

And hide your earth-shooned feet; a thinnest veil
Of woven mist about you, and a frail

Tiara of gold blossoms in your hair,—
Why do you tarry all the seasons there?

Are you not weary waiting night and day
For the Belovèd long upon his way?

And does doubt never fret with swift unrest
The aching hunger of your virgin breast?

And do you never feel the miseries
That crawl about your feet in days like these?

Sorrow that like a barren bee makes hum
But drops no honey in the empty comb;

And busyness that seeks in a steep way
A slippery release of day from day;

And tears withheld so long the eyes forget
Weeping makes mortal sweetness doubly sweet;

And pain untold of youth that, withering,
Can hardly say it has a song to sing,

But only snatches caught at unaware
And lost too quickly in the noonday air;

And grief for ripened youth sailing afar
To what heroic gesturing of war. . . .

Oh, will you never stoop and throw you down
And groan for pity of the sorry town?

Ah, beautiful and pitiful! ah, last
And fairest of the daughters of the Past

Born out of time and in most grievous days
When unto beauty men mete out no praise!

Lone Gothic princess, all your line is dead:
The glory of your race is vanished: fled

Is that high faith that should have found in you
Its meet delight and its expression true:

For you should be, O Virgin-like! a shrine
Of her that made virginity divine:

Mary's handmaiden, garlanded with bells,
The haunt of holy nuns and miracles.

But men no longer pray, and if they do
Their thought and action prove the prayer untrue.

Your elder sister, gray and glorious grown,
She born to Rheims, the Hun has overthrown;

The Iron Heel with which all Hell is shod
Trod on her womb that bore the seed of God;

Her hands were tortured and plucked-out her eyes;
Her rose-heart, broken, on the atrium lies.

And you that never in your care have held
The Bread and Wine; where never yet have swelled

Anthem and incense, should they tear your walls
You would fall blindly, as a swart heathen falls.

Yet for your sake I speed my wingèd song
Beyond the thunderous clamour of the throng

To where the bards of ages gone still raise
For lovely things like you their luted praise.

I, pittancer of Poetry, your dole
Of song deal out to you; for you my soul

Have gladdened many a bitter nightmare night
When homeless, hungry, with no dawn in sight,

I walked the cruel streets, longing to be,
In that sheer midnight of my misery,

A corpse upon the waters mourning clad
That round the City flow forever sad.

Then, luminous, divine, you seemed to me
Like Jesus when He preached in Galilee

And blessed the lowly and their glory told
And He was clothed in kindness as in gold.

In seasons of unreasoning despair,
When hate crawled to my heart and feasted
there,

And love knew not my lips, but, grief oppressed,
Lay, a dead burthen, heavy on my breast,—

Oh, charm of lovely things! you stilled my grief,
And, reaching to your beauty, leaf by leaf,

My soul would bloom, a lily tall and white
Thirstily drinking from your dewy light.

So I forgot my hunger, reconciled
To God and man; become a little child

For very love of you, and all night long
My heart was like a honeycomb of song.

Therefore, O lyric-lofty, lily-white!
The Lord's own taper burning in the night

For souls that walk in darkness, ave! hail!
The Lord is with you. He has wound that veil

Of silken mist about you. He has given
Your beauty for a promise of His Heaven,

And granted you, for court of councillors,
The wise, unerring order of the stars.—

Say, when the wars are ended, will this pain
Of hunger cease, or is it all in vain?

For Mrs. Chester Griswold, Jr.

THE KNIGHT IN GRAY

(In the Fashion of a Moldavian Doina)

Colour of the poplar leaf!
  Death shall keep secret this one thing:
The restlessness that was my grief
  Since first we budded in the Spring.

Aye, he was sweet! the girls will say,
  And all the world shall hear of me;
The poplar leaf is not so gray,
  Or mountain mist so free.

But nothing matters except this thing:
  My arms are rhythmic to my breath,
And I must live the songs I sing
  To save my songs from death.

Nay, but I always fought and died!
  And ever I entered the lists of war
With a king's sadness and the pride
  Of an emperor.

And if some hate, no hate have I
  Who fight for love and love alone
Returning to the earth and sky
  Their elements I own.

The songs I sang came to my lips
  The way of seeds to fields afar,

Shaken from trees whose budding tips
  Were lances sharpening for war.

My deeds were gestures in the wind,
  I bent the way of a poplar bough,
And if I fell, and if I sinned,
  A larger breath shall lift me now.

Where trampling armies melt the snow
  And wounded men clutch withered grass,
Torn from myself my self shall go
  The way of rivers down a pass.

It will not be the sudden blindness
  Of a beast's awakèning,
But that impulsive heat of kindness
  That quickens in the Spring.

So, with the rush of summer rain
  I shall have swept across the earth,
And if it chance myself be slain,
  My self shall have a richer birth.

And, *He was true!* the lads will say,
  And all the world shall hear of me:
The poplar leaf is not so gray,
  Or mountain mist so free.

For Leon Feraru, of Rumania.

THE TALE FROM FAERIELAND

PASTORALE

(*Prélude de Bach 16 Clavier bien Temperé*)

Colin the shepherd on a day of Spring
When all was greenery and bourgeoning,
Under a tree, a slender tree and young
That had not yet borne fruit, made tender song;
And ewe and ram and sportive lambs around
With bells on them that had a gentle sound,
Gamboled in peace, while overhead the sky
Bore curly clouds that to the shepherd's eye
Were like a flock of fleecy little sheep
Pasturing there in the Lord's holy keep.

Colin the shepherd felt in wind and grass
And in all lovely fleeting things that pass
The breath of Beauty, cool upon his soul.
His heart knew not as yet passion's control:
It was the Spring for him, as for the year,
As for the little tree he held so dear,
As for the flowers that unhindered grew;
And his full being gathered, like bright dew,
A peacefulness that quieted all need,—
Therefore he blew upon his oaten reed.

For Mrs. Robert L. Taylor.

THE TALE FROM FAERIELAND

WHAT time I lay in bed, loth to arise,
A vision came to me, dazzling mine eyes.

I could not choose but lie abed all day,
Threading sweet words to weave it in a lay.

(So I forgot my hunger, and the deep
Sadness that made me long for endless sleep.)

Not any of the ancient tapestries
Could tell a tale more wonderful than this.

For here, in words of purple and of gold,
And words of silk and silver, Love was told.

And here were figures, marvellously drawn,
Of gods and men, of sunset and of dawn.

And here were symbols, such as Merlin loves,
A Cross, a Herd of Lambs, a Flock of Doves.

And a deep labyrinth, most intricate,
Through whose black vaults unwound the thread
of Fate.

And here were words, like roses; and loud words,
Like to the sudden flight of many birds.

And woodland words, like leaves, that, tremulous
Forever, made the verses murmurous.

And one word was a moon: a syllable
Argent and chaste and fraught with many a spell.

And one word was a sun, and it was round,
And it was warm, and had a golden sound.

And one soft word was maiden-fleshed, rose-white,
Delicate-veined; it held the day and night.

And all these words I wove into a lay,
A cloth of words, that made my sad heart gay.

When it was finished, folding it, I said,
"The King will buy it!"—and got up from bed.

"The King will buy my lyric tapestry,
And hang it on his wall for all to see,

"So that the fame of it shall travel far,
Even to where the holy hermits are,

"Who, pausing at their matin prayers, will say:
'It must be fairer than the birth of day!

" 'God bless the hands that wove it, and God bless
The soul of Man that dreamed such loveliness!' "

And I repeated, "He will buy it for
A treasure of his golden corridor.

"And he will wear it for a robe, when some
Beautiful Queen to visit him is come.

"It shall befit him as its petals do
A lily blossom that is wet with dew.

"It shall befit him as the veil of night
Befits a day that was too gay with light.

"It shall befit him as its carven sheath
Befits a mighty sword whose touch is death.

"It shall befit him so that, seeing him,
The Queen will feel her very soul to swim.

"And on that holiday when they shall wed,
'Twill serve to canopy the nuptial bed."

So with my lyric cloth I made my way
Unto the Palace, and my heart was gay.

A critic met me at the guarded door.
" 'Twill do," said he, "to clean the kitchen floor;

"Or else, perhaps, to garb the lowlihead
Of kitchen wenches, for, you see," he said,

"The colours are too gaudy and the style
Is obsolete."—His lips were black with bile.

"The subject is antique; you should have fraught
Your pretty dreams with valiant, modern
thought.

"Your tale is vague; it should be definite!
I hardly can make head or tail of it."—

And so he punned and jeered for a long while,
But crueler than all was his wise smile.

"Do not despair, for you are young," he said,
"And yet can learn."—The heart within me
bled.

But I was hungry, so for copper sold
My cloth of words of silver and of gold.

And went my way, the way that outcasts go,
To where the kind, black-vestured waters flow.

And some nights later, Cinderella wore
The woof that I had woven. Faerie lore

Says that it hung within the King's great hall
A wondrous marvel and a joy to all.

And pilgrims came from all the lands there be,
Beyond the desert and beyond the sea,

To glad their souls, for it was said it had
The power to make Love-loving people glad.

And one bold Jason, loving it too well,
Wrought many deeds, the which Greek legends tell.

And so it passed from hand to hand, nor e'er
Lost its delight, but always seemed more fair.

For all the loveliness for which men long,
The charm of childhood and the charm of song;

The innocence of things that live and die
Rooted on earth, yet pining for the sky;

The courage and the faith that women bear
Who conquer pain and trample on despair;

All this that I had felt, that I had known,
Was threaded in that cloth that all can own

Who by the grace of loving much are given
Hands that can plant on earth the flowers of Heaven.

So when the Christ was dead, who died for Love,
Magdalen brought the cloth that I had wove,

And Joseph of Arimathæa dressed
The Sad Man with it, and laid Him to rest.

Thus for three days God wore it, and the third,
When at the piping of the first song bird

Sweet Jesus rose, a glorious sight to see,
Lo! round His shoulders hung my tapestry.

And it befit Him as its petals do
A lily blossom that is wet with dew.

And it befit Him as the starry night
Befits a day that has been gay with light.

And it befit Him as its carven sheath
Befits a mighty sword whose touch is death.

And He will wear it on the Judgement Day,
And of it all His holy Saints will say:

"God bless the hands that wove it, and God bless
The soul of Man that dreamed such loveliness!"

For Mrs. Charles E. Schauffler.

TO A YOUNG MAN

(For a portrait by Giorgione at the Royal Gallery, Berlin)

WHAT sacring fingers smoothed your pulpy hair,
And touched your lips and left their silence there,
That with a cool decorum you gaze out
Upon a world that holds for you no doubt
Nor any restlessness?

Youth that is fleet,
With feet that ever run after desire,
Has never burned within you. Prim and sweet,
You are a taper still unkissed of fire.
And though I love you much, I hardly know
Whether to cling to you, or let you go.

For Don Pedro Henríquez Ureña.

THE BOX OF SANDALWOOD

I.

THIS poem is a box of sandalwood.
When I have locked and sealed it, in the end,
I will inscribe it thus: *Here lies my Friend,*
All that was true of her, evil and good,
And in a hidden closet of my room,
That will grow damp lacking the kindly sun,
This box shall lie, until her shrift is done,
As finally concealed as in a tomb.
So for a tide,—perhaps until to-morrow,
Perhaps until the end of nights and days,—
Keeping all joy 'twill also keep all sorrow.
Befall what may, when Judgement trumpets call
The dead shall rise, each with its proper face,
And she from out this box or not at all.

II.

Deep in the bottom I will lay her speech.
It used to be a gentle-mannered child
With eyes that were so secretive and wild
That though I knew whatever books can teach
I stood perplexed before it, guessing half
And missing most of what they meant to say;
And it had rosy legs that in glad play
Would show, and flee me, when she used to laugh.
But most I loved her dear embodied voice

When with its arms outstretched for a caress
It used to trip to me across the noise
Of parlour talk, of restaurant or street.
Now it shall lie, returned to nothingness,
Close-eyed, with folded hands and quiet feet.

III.

The smell of her was a persuasion. No,
Rather it was a furtive urgency
Akin to the control over the sea
That the moon has, directing ebb and flow.
The smell of her that troubled me so much,
That made my flesh a forest thick with fauns,
That kept me hard awake midnights and dawns
Afevered for the torture of her touch;
The smell of her I sensed in every wind,
The smell of her that made my nostrils wide,
The smell of her that struck me sudden blind,
That wronged me so!—now that it cannot stir
The beast that bides in me, I put beside
That innocence that was the voice of her.

IV.

The colours of her body were all clean
And transparent and fine and tinged with gold;
Her bosom had the pallour of an old
Kerchief of linen woven for a queen,
Her arms a whiteness where the pulses hushed;
She had pearl shadows where the eyelids swell,

And in her eyes gray depths of miracle,
And dawn itself blushed envious when she blushed.
Ah me, that all of this I must forego!
My eyes are pleasureless under the sun:
There are no lovely lights on sea or snow:
Hers only were the colours of the world;
I fold them now, as when a war is done
The beaten flags are taken down and furled.

V.

Her moods were dresses fitly made and worn:
Short fluffy skirts of Columbine for joy,
And stiff brocade when bent upon annoy,
And wide majestic hoops to clothe her scorn;
And for her wrath, red samite; for her pride,
Fantastic velvet; but, when moods were done,
Cool woven whiteness made her seem a nun
Or first communicant or virgin bride.
These she would change a hundred times a day
Outrivalling the richness of the sky,
Until it seemed her mind had givèn way
Who could not keep for long one character
But through all colours rapidly would fly
Making a rainbow of the ways of her.

VI.

The things she used to say are bric-à-brac
And jewelled rings and Sèvres porcelain,

And one quick phrase that used to give me pain
A Spanish poniard that my blood made black;
And she said things like cinnamon and figs,
And homely things all woven of gray wool,
And futile anythings: a broken spool,
A leadless pencil and some withered twigs. . . .
Falsehoods and lies! Of all the things she said
There's not a single one her image bears:
She was too shrewd to speak her mind; instead
She took and gave what nearest lay at hand,
So made it seem all the world's things were hers,
And, found out, cried: You did not understand!

VII.

Her gestures were the Springtime in a tree
That has no leaves but only swelling tips,
And a bird's flight across her eyes and lips,
And a ship's passage through a misty sea.
Oh, I have seen her face rise like a moon,
And droop like gillyflowers in the rain;
And when she bore my weight and felt the strain
Hers were the long-drawn throbs of a lagoon.
Dance could portray her; words are much too sure
To give the world a sense of her unrest;
Yet, since in her nothing can move or lure,
Since the unstable certainty of one time
Fails in its purposes, quiet is best
And I should make a musicless dead rhyme.

VIII.

Our long caresses, were they fruit or flame?
Apples of fire, certainly, whose juice
Burned my lips withered for another's use.
Oh passionate excess no night could tame!
Bacchantic ritual where in arduous toil,
And to the struggling music of a song,
She clipped my loins of roses, sucked my tongue
Of honey-milk, and sapped my blood of oil!
Lord Christ, we were no Christians, she and I.
Pagans we were who knew no sin in this.
We used to wonder why you had to die
Who were so young and sweet. But now I know:
Repentant now I put away each kiss,
Seeds dry of life which had you blessed might grow.

IX.

There were in her cool fountains where the flocks
That Pan controls would stir the soil beneath
And darken the clean water with their breath;
But evermore inviolate, in rocks
High inaccessible, the springs would flow
Most taintless and untaintable. She knew
Eternal innocence, who, being true
To her own self, no utter sin could know.
She was not made of wax, she was not made
Of wood or cloth; she was all human; she

Could feel, and want, and dare; then be afraid
And, blinded, fall. Yet ever would she rise,
Keeping intact her gift of chastity,
Shriven in God, reproachless in men's eyes.

X.

My box is almost full. My heart, poor thing,
It must lie here, beside her innocence;
It ever lacked, not wanted, reticence;
It was like a young animal in the Spring,
Glad of the world and panting for delight;
Wingèd I think it was, or perhaps showed
Bright onyx horns, I cannot tell: the road
Was always steep, and it was always night,
So whether my heart flew or raced, no one
May rightly say; but ever in her wake
It followed after. Now its goal is won.
Whoever reads this poem, Christian friend,
Pray her and me good rest, for Mary's sake:—
I loved, and she is dead: this is the end.

For Mr. Ralph Roeder.

CANDLE LIGHT

THE seven candles spread over the walls
Their seven thicknesses of light. I wish
That I could fold up from the litten wall
The seven golden cloths of candle light.

Of these I'd make a banner, or a sail;
Perhaps a tent; or else, against my death,
A precious cerement, for this light is cool
And would not plot against the will of Death.

For Mr. John Pierrepont Rice.

FLEUR D'OR

Life is a flower
  Petalled with gold,
And, as each hour
  In the bells is tolled,

And shadows crawl
  From the setting sun,
The petals fall
  One by one.

For Señor Mariano Brull.

SONG OF THE POPPY

—"Poppy flower growing alone in a field of rye,
Will you be my true love, Poppy, will you care for me?"
—"Mother says I am too young, but I'd love to try;
You will teach me, won't you, dear?"—"You will see."

—"Poppy flower withering, withering in a field of snow,
Will you be my true love, Poppy, will you come with me?"
—"It's rather poor I am, but I'd love to go;
It won't hurt me, will it, dear?"—"You will see."

—"Poppy flower withered, withered on a frozen lane,
Will you be my true love, Poppy, will you lie with me?"
—"Oh I would, but all my limbs are full of pain,
Sun and wind and rain have had their way with me!"

SONG OF THE POPPY'S LOVER

WHEN my poppy blossom
  Grew wings and fled,
Golden turned the petals
  That were red.

I hate money, Mother,
  That has wronged me so!
Soured my honey, Mother,
  Blackened my snow.

ARIA IN G

I stole a pencil from a beggar that was blind.
I had no gold, I had no silver, but in my mind
A song was singing for the beggar that was blind.

I am forever seeking what I am never finding.
All I may do in the evening shall not be binding,—
Oaths or vows,—for the darkness has a way of blinding.

I am forever finding what I am never seeking:
Women who are always laughing, and people speaking,
And doors who are always shutting and their hinges creaking.

THE SWORD OF WONDER

Youth calls, Love calls, and the last of all is Death:
Their song is always the same, and their even breath.

Where the beaten road ends suddenly, a little space
Beyond the first sparse trees of the untracked wood,
There I saw him, first and last, with a light around his face
And a golden glory glowing where he stood.

I was not surprised to find him; long ago
I had heard his voice that called to me, that sang to me:
"Twenty paces from the laurel where the laurel-roses grow
There's the shining sword of wonder that shall make the wide world free!"

You could not tell the country where he came from;
He was so very vague and dazzling and so very young;
Like a dream he would vanish, like a memory he would come,
And always, always singing his snatch of song.

Where he stood he smiled. "And are you coming, too?"
I told him that I could not for I had wood to cut,
And wayward sheep to care for, and a hundred things to do
Or ever I should want to leave my woodland hut.

"Well, it's then that I must be going, for the way is long," he said,
"And I must put the woods between us before it can be dawn."
I begged him not to leave me, but he shook his head
And smiled, so knowing-like and laughing, and was gone.

Three years, perhaps, or more. I had forgotten him.
A beggar came, so weak, so very torn and tired,
His breath was very feeble and his eyes were twilight dim,
And a little rest, he said, was all that he desired.

I led him to the hut, where it was nice and warm;
I gave him wine to drink, and I gave him currant bread;
And I asked him saying, "If it is no sort of harm,
I'd like to know your name," and "It's Love," he said.

So, *"Love,"* I thought, *"this* Love?" and took
him for a liar;
For though I'd never seen him I thought I knew
Love's face,
With the roses on his cheek and his mouth on fire
While the beggar's face was haunted-like, a
lonely ruined place.

When he had done with eating he rose, so slow,
"And are you coming with me," he said, "and
will you follow me?
*Twenty paces from the laurel where the laurel-
roses grow*
*There's the shining sword of wonder that shall
make the wide world free!"*

But I told him he was lying and I told him to
be away;
He bowed his head so sadly. "True," he said,
"the path is long
And I must put the woods between us before it
can be day."
And so he went away, forever, with his snatch of
song.

Oh, strangers came and strangers went, some
borrowed and some stole;
My years like ripened fruit they gathered and
took away,

And it's now that I have nothing left except it
be my soul
And a prayer, only one prayer, for the birth of
day.

When the birth of day is come, then I will go
Across the untracked wood where it will be dawn
for me,
Twenty paces from the laurel where the laurel-
roses grow
And the sword of wonder shines that makes the
wide world free.

For Mr. Raymond Weeks.

FIRST LOVE REVIVED

I

Spring Song in Winter

Twelve times the Spring put blossoms on the trees
And stirred the Winter-weary blood of young
Hearts; but for one there were no far degrees
Between the tides of silence and of song,
No difference in meaning between snow
Noiselessly falling and the whir of wings;
The calendar had brought me long ago
My only May, and Time had no more Springs.
But this is miracle that you are come!
And the sweet season opens; seeds are quick
Inside of me, and birds peck at my side,
And all myself am choral that was dumb,
And straight that drooped, and healthy that was sick,
Though yesterday, they say, the Summer died.

II

The Claim

Such a long time! . . . Had you not been the first
I would have surely, now, forgotten you
The way I have forgotten the dispersed
Loves that have intervened, true and untrue,

Too many to remember, but each one
Exactly like the others in one point:
Being too easily done and undone,
Too quick to offer and to disappoint.
But you, who made no promises, who came
Unheralded, unsought; from whom I still
Find it too hard to name what I could want,—
O First my Love! with undiminished claim
You take lordly possession of my will
And make me my own heart's blind mendicant.

III

On Her Photograph When She Was Nine

You too have changed. Whoever knows you now—
So tall and stately, with a haughty grace
In that most courtly way in which you bow—
Can only see the beauty of your face
And venture on your loveliness of heart;
But when this print was taken, still untaught
In feigning what you felt, with artless art
Your every attitude revealed your thought.
Then was no choice of words, no argument
To be discreetly settled; all was told
With unknown lack of reticence and pride:
Love's noisy awe that ever came and went
Was thunder could not crush us who were bold
With innocence and had no plots to hide.

IV

The Difference

That year you were at Biarritz by the sea
Painting on porcelain, what was I doing?
Most likely, weary with the heart of me,
Wasting my heart in meaningless quick wooing.
So you have this to offer, a blue plate
That keeps the sky and water of that year,
And I, the dull remembrance of a date
When my dumb lips moved for a listless ear.
You watched the sea and watched the sky, and sky
And sea were kind and beautiful to you
(I think that you have grown to be as they!);
But by the Michigan, where the mists lie
Like age upon the waters gray and blue,
My heart went to the moon in blue and gray.

V

Love's Selfishness

You say, "If I had died in the meanwhile. . . ."
And I, "If you had married!" And you turn
Your face to me and with a serious smile
Dismiss the selfishness of my concern.
I cannot help it, child. God made me so.
And since all flesh with Death at last must bide,
Rather than wed I wish you dead, for woe
A man may bear who fails at wounded pride.

Then make your bed where chastity may keep
Inviolate, beyond my jealousy;
With certain rest and virtuous and divine,
Blessèd are they that a long sleep can sleep;
And you may choose your comfort among three
Such beds: your maidenhood's, and Death's, and
mine.

VI

BEGINNING OF THE END

You let me kiss your hand, and half amused
At that so true, so pretty lover's play,
Your face took an expression that has bruised
The tender flesh of all my thoughts to-day;
For there are doubts fall heavier than a rod
And pierce deeper than knives. Beaten and cut
My thoughts of you go beggar-like to God,
For on their grief all the world's doors are shut.
Are you so used to reverence so meek
That now it seems superfluous and absurd?
Or was I blind and did not understand?—
There is no one to tell me. Should I speak,
The world would scorn my sentimental word.
I wish to God I had not kissed your hand!

VII

THE END

So large was that first love it held the moon
And sun and stars within its arching fold,

Yet now, alas! one vocal afternoon
Of memories suffice it to be told.
So flowers bloom: who loved the flowers keep
Brown withered petals and a faint perfume;
So Waking echoes what was told in Sleep;
And so are epitaphs writ on a tomb.
This is the end. First Love is dead and gone.
The flesh of him is lilies on the earth.
His soul is in the wind. This is the end.
He grew and died the way a rose is blown.
This is the end. Another love has birth.—
I hail the Queen! But oh, my Little Friend!

For María Teresa.

THE LITTLE FOXES

Not of the rocks is love afraid,
These it may climb;
But the small sands that fret it and abrade,
The minutes of inconsequential time,
The little words of undetected ill,
The careless deeds not of your fault or mine,
These tear and wear it out until,
With impotent sad will,
We let the little foxes spoil the vine.

THE SORRY MADRIGAL

So like the Spring she was,—warm, not too
warm,
And sweet to smell,—
There was no guile in her, or any harm
In what befell.

Except the seasons change, flowers to fruit
And fruit to seed,
And seeds must break or ever leaf and root
Fulfill their need.

For Miss Anna Benedicta Carolan.

"I WOULD BE TELLING YOU"

I WOULD be telling you
  How the tamarind tree
Is blue with blossoms now,—
  But what is that to me?

Or what the garden where
  Jasmine is glad abloom
Though there is use for jasmine
  Only to deck her tomb?

Rest to her soul, and peace
  To her heart! But I
Will ease my heart of sorrow
  Under an alien sky.

I have no wish to be
  Home again, now home
To see is blind, and hidden
  To know, and to speak dumb.

"HER WISH WAS THAT MYSELF SHOULD BE"

Her wish was that myself should be
The one to fold her arms and close
Her eyes. That was her hope of me.
But when her sun of darkness rose,—

The day that made all daylight gray
In my house,—with her prayers I
Thanked God because of the new day
Who saw it in a foreign sky.

So I am bent on blasphemy,
And beating with unholy words
At God's door, I will not let be
The joy in her that is the Lord's.

TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN INDIFFERENT TO THE PAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

"It is dawn."—*Pan American Poetry.*

I am the man who dreamed the new day dawned
And so arose at midnight with a cry
And came to where the many sleepers lie
Who only pushed their pillows up and yawned
And fell asleep again. Now in the curled
Abysses of the dark my feet are fast
Entangled, and I wait my weary last
Impotent, mad, and sick of all the world.
Yea, now I fall. So let it be. I know
Somewhere a womb is pregnant with my word:
Bigging it bides the ripe appointed day;
Somewhere the east is all with rose aglow;
But you shall know no dawn till whip and sword
And good blood flowing drive your sleep away!

"OH GLORIOUS SPENDTHRIFT JOY!"

Oh glorious spendthrift joy! though small my
purse,
My gestures seem to sweep the universe,
So with the gift my largeness of goodwill
Goes out of me, leaving me richer still.
Yet with the beggars,—on every road, at all
Cathedral doorways, morning, evenfall
And dawn again,—have I been mendicant
Who nowhere in the world could fill the want
That like a hungry leech sucks at my side
Or wolf-toothed rends me leaving pale and wide
The gashes on my flesh. . . . Aye, clothed in
rags
I mourn, and pass, under the pride of flags
Through which I see, as through a beggar's
cloak,
The lean flesh of the world!—
Who was it spoke
Of charity? Who said of love it was
Pulse in the wind, and in the luminous
Burst of the morning, sunlight, and in green
Gardens the fruit that makes them fair beseen?
Knew he the hunger moving in the air,
Howling how wildly in what a mad despair
Of emptiness? Knew he how that all fruit
Ever insatiate pushes thirsty root
Into the quick of earth, and thirsty leaf
(Oh tongue never indrawn!) with untold grief

Unfolds day after day and every hour?
Or did he know how never held a flower
Dewdrop sufficient for when sunlight burns?—
This then is charity, this love, that turns,
Devouring, on that it used to feed! Alas,
That grass upon the earth, earth on the grass,
In what a whirl of living without end,
Nourishment find!—Thou of Assisi, friend
Intimate of all things, was it right fair
To lure sad brother Wolf from his warm lair
And teach him mongrel tricks? Think how all things
Are crueler than he: no bird that sings
Giving her soul in melody, but takes
Mine own in payment, drags it and forsakes;
No scent of lily and no hue of rose,
No water's coolness and no cool repose
Of marble carved, but for the alms they give
Demand of me all life that I can live
And life not mine for which I seek in vain
In riot and in quietness and in pain,
Until, with empty hands and unpaid debt,
Bankrupt to the world's beauty, I regret
For what a little thing, vanished so quite,
I gave away indifference and the right
To dwell untroubled, self-sufficient, sure. . . .

Give over loving, heart of me! procure
Yourself a sleeping place in some deep ground
Where you may know no music, nor the sound

Of weeping. Give over giving, heart of me!
Give over everything! That day shall be
When, rested quite, you may awake again,
A rich, strong heart among the hearts of men,
And capable of beauty and despair;
But you are too weak now! Say the prayer
Your Mother taught you, and lest nightmares
ride
Your little sleep, turn to the other side,
Like a good child, my heart! . . .

For Don Rufino González Mesa.

So finely had they thrilled, in lusty fire
The sturdy metals of their flesh became
One single molten heap of glowing flame,
And like a flame they heaved until desire,
Cooling with many shivers and long breath,
Left them aweary on that Autumn hill;
And suddenly they noticed it was chill,
And morning dawning, and she thought of death.
"If it should be," she thought, "then it must
die!"
So scorned the man where selfishly he lay,
A used, exhausted thing under the sky;
And plucked a pear and ate it hungrily,
And did not fear the coming of the day:
Her child was twenty fathoms undersea.

JOY

Joy and I together
  On a soft warm bed
Dreamed of pleasant weather
  Lying head to head.

Joy and I together
  Kissed till dawn was red:
—"Now be still, my darling,
  I am tired," Joy said.

When I woke, a shutter
  Made a creaking noise;
I saw a candle splutter;
  Heard a leaden voice. . . .

Noon it was of daytime,
  All the world was gold.
—"Now be still, my darling,
  Honey must be sold;

"Though the bees are hungry,
  Honey must be sold!"
Noon it was of daytime
  And an old bell tolled.

For Don Martín Luis Guzmán.

HUNGER IN THE CITY

WHERE did Satan haunt me,
  When did he tempt me and subdue?
In the city, when I was lonely
And hungry,—O my Heart, when I had only
My shadow to lie beside me, and the weight of
    you!

How did Satan come
  And how did he appear?
He stole into my soul,
Into my soul and into my blood he stole,
I only felt him, felt him, I did not see or hear.

First like a pleasant weakness,
  A feverish, warm thrill,
Then pain, O Heart, not anywhere
Within me, but close about me in the air,
Blowing over the city like a wet wind and chill.

And after that a darkness
  Heavier than lead,
All full of writhing things
And ineffectual vomitings
And voices wailing, wailing, *We are damned*
    and dead!

THE MAKER OF RED CLAY JARS

I

Jars

This is the place I meant, my place. You see,
The soil is barren and uncommon red:
There are no flowers for the like of me
To have a lover take them from my head.
This clay is only good for making jars;
They are so pretty, 'tis a grief to know
Their mouths are always gaping at the stars,
Their hearts are full of all the winds that blow.

II

Song

In a red clay jar,
  Ashes of the dead;
In a red clay jar,
  In a red clay jar.

When the Summer comes
  Roses will bloom red
From the gray, gray ashes
  In the red clay jar.

Oh my heart is broken,
  And my youth is fled,
All my life is buried
  In a red clay jar,

In a red clay jar,—
Jesu pity me!

III

To the Gardener

Won't you let me go into your garden a little while?
I would like to see a flowèr-bed; I would like to see
Black earth, green grass, white lilies file on file
And maybe little blossoms falling from a tree.

Won't you let me pluck a little flowèr? just only one!
I would like to put it on my hair; I would like to think
It's this that would have stopped him in the sun
And moved his thirst to ask me for a long cool drink.

IV

Heard in the Wind

—"I make clay jars, red clay, all red, and you?"
—"I make clay jars, green clay, and some is blue."
—"Some folks are born with all that luck, I say!"
—"I'd give my green and blue for your red clay!"

For Mr. Joseph Edgar Chamberlain.

DELGADINA

THERE was a king that ruled in Spain,
And vines had he were fair beseen,
And orchards heavy with their fruit,
And proud and tall and fair his queen.

The king and queen were on their throne,
About them sat their daughters three;
Below, the pages pressed the grapes,
And all around them was minstrelsy.

The king, he drank and he drank again:
Like litten lamps his glances burn,
Like seaport lamps that slowly move
And light up that on which they turn.

He will not look upon the queen,
Nor on the elder sisters fair,
But on the youngest princess of all
He turns the heavy drunken stare.

He will not glance upon the queen,
Nor on the elder daughters there,
Virgin of Mercy, what can it mean,
The heavy drunkenness of his stare?

—"Ah, Delgadina, my Delgadina,
Full sweet are you about the waist!"
The queen, she will not look for scorn;
The little princess breathes in haste.

—"Ah, Delgadina, my Delgadina,
The length of you will fit my bed!"
The sisters two push up their lips;
The little princess hangs her head.

—"Ah, Delgadina, my Delgadina,
Your breasts are ripe, right well I see!"
Then up and spake the little princess:
—"Oh fie, and turn that look from me!

"It is of garden trees you speak,
Of linen woven cool and fine,
Of the ripe fruit your orchards bear
And of the grape upon your vine!"

—"I speak of you, my Delgadina,
And you shall lie with me this day!"
The queen, she will not look for scorn;
The sisters two they look away.

—"Nay, father, rather I were dead
Or ever such a shame should be!"
—"Then in the tower shall you bide
Until you will to lie with me!"

High is the tower and dark within,
But through a winghole for a bird,
Below the tower and all about
The little princess can be heard.

—"Mother, my mother, where you lie
Combing your hair, combing your hair,
If you be true my mother mine
Give me to drink!

"Sisters, my sisters, where you sit
Weaving your veils, weaving your veils,
If you be true my sisters mine
Give me to drink!"

The queen, she will not look for scorn;
The sisters two push up their lip;
Into the cup the king's hands hold
The white grape and the red grape drip.

—"Father, my father, where you are
Filling your cup, filling your cup,
If you be true my father mine
Give me to drink!"

Up rose the king and loud his word:
—"Unlock the tower! Give her my cup!"
The pages clambered up the stairs,
Dead is the burthen they take up.

From either breast a milk-white dove,
From either lip a butterfly
Opened their wings and flew away,
But lilies drooped on either eye.

The queen, she did not look for scorn,
  The sisters two pushed up their lip,
And a madness fell upon the king
  Watching the white and red grape drip.

For Mr. Daniel E. Wheeler.

OF TIME AND SONG

THE years are like young fruit-trees, bearing
days.
The days are fruit on which the sunlight plays
And they grow ripe and fall in their due time
Just as the apple does, just as the lime
Or any fruit whatever. And as fruit,
Returning to the earth, give to the root
That fed the tree that bore them a new strength,
So all our yesterdays, dissolved at length
Into the soil of everlasting time,
Make rich the present.

In my arms of rhyme
I bring a harvest of my gathering,
Songs like pomegranates, songs like lovely fruit,
That it was mine to pluck away, or sing.
And these shall waste to strengthen some young
root
In days to be, as songs of singers gone
Nourished the songs I sing.

Thus, on and on,
All days are somehow linked, all songs are one.

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH DAY AND TO $1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY OVERDUE.

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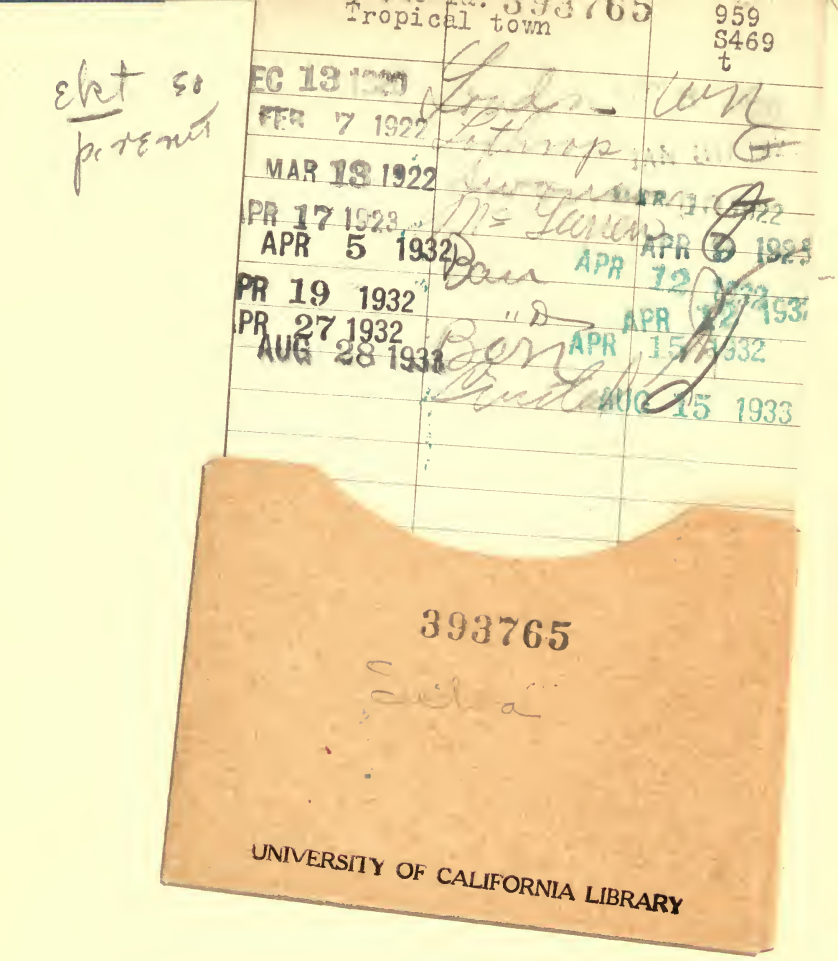

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